

# Saving Your Family Documentation

Potential archives exist everywhere and are created everyday! You keep important documents, letters, diaries, photographs, audio/video tapes, slides, and scrapbooks and add to your own collection periodically. However, depending on the care you give your records, they may or may not last very long.

Heat, Humidity, and Light are the three greatest enemies to the longevity of any record! Whether the record in question is in paper, photographic, cloth, or magnetic form, the two most damaging areas to store records in the average household are the attic, which often has extremes in temperatures depending on the season, and the basement, which is often damp. Sunlight, or any light source can damage your records in a relatively short period of time. If your records are stored in a dark environment with a constant temperature and relative humidity, chances are they will last far longer than if stored in an environment that experiences extremes in temperature and humidity.

Framed or mounted objects: Be it photographs, certificates, paintings, posters, or needlework, the object should never be hung so it has direct exposure to sunlight or any intense lighting source. An indirect lighting source or a shield from exposure to ultra-violet radiation should lessen the speed with which the object fades. The backing boards or material behind the object should be of archival quality (acid & lignin free), so there won't be a bleed-through from the backing material that will damage the object. The framed object should never be hung from a single wire or hook, but always from two points. Screws and nails can come loose and if your object is supported from only one point, the object may be severely damaged when it crashes to the floor. Smokey or dusty environments will also damage the object over time, however, the framed object should never be in direct contact with a glass or plexiglass front. An airspace should be created between the object and the glass, otherwise it may adhere to the glass and be difficult if not impossible to remove without damaging the object.

Phono discs (phonographs, records, LPs, 45's, 78's), and compact discs: Phono discs should be stored upright and supported to prevent warping. Compact discs (as well as other optical discs and computer discs) should be stored upright, in rigid plastic containers. Shelves should be wide enough so discs do not overhang and the shelving should be grounded.

If you are interested in learning to preserve your family's records for the future, or placing your personal records in an archives, please contact:



**Our mission: to educate through the identification, preservation, and interpretation of Idaho's cultural heritage.**

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## Saving Your Family Documentation cont.

Photographs, negatives, slides, motion picture film: Black & White photographs, slides, and negatives, if properly processed and stored, will last centuries. Color images are much more sensitive to light, heat, and relative humidity. In fact, the images will generally last longest if stored in a refrigerator in moisture-proof packaging! However, an area that is well ventilated, dark, and where the temperature is fairly constant between 60-70 F with a stable humidity range between 20% and 40% your photographs will last for years.

Scrapbooks, albums, books: If you store your precious photographs in an album, be aware of the types of materials which the album is composed. Avoid photographic albums or scrapbooks contain pages that are highly acidic or may contain chemicals that will eventually contribute to the deterioration of your prints. If you use the right kind of paper (acid & lignin free) and the right kind of mounting corners (not glues or self sealing plastic) your pictures will give you and others years of pleasure. Never use glue, staples, metal paper clips or rubber bands to fasten or hold your materials! Identify your prints on the album page or by writing lightly in pencil on the margin edge of the back of the photograph. Remember to include the date and names in the description. Plastic sleeves, if they are made from an inert plastic such as polyester, polyethylene, or cellulose triacetate are an excellent way to store both prints and negatives. However, be very aware that many photographic storage sleeves are made from poly-vinyl-chloride, a plastic which emits a gas that is harmful to photographic prints. A rule of thumb is if the plastic has a discernable odor it probably is not suitable for long-term storage. Bound materials usually last longer if they are stored horizontally rather than vertically.

Magnetic tapes, (audio and videocassettes), electronic records: These materials do not have a long life-span (usually no more than 10 years) and should periodically be replayed and recopied. The should be stored far from an electro-magnetic power source (such as a TV, stereo, radio, computer, or just about anything with an electric motor) as the tape can easily be erased or degraded. Magnetic media should be shelved upright, on grounded shelving or in grounded cabinets. Tapes housed in canisters should be turned periodically, to avoid the ill effects of uneven gravitational pull.

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